



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION,
HEALTH, AND HUMAN
PERFORMANCE

THE STORY OF BURKE HIGH SCHOOL: IMPROVING A LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

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School of Education, Health, and Human Performance
College of Charleston



Burke High School

The Burke story is four years in the making. In 2005, when the chief academic officer of schools in Charleston County Schools (S.C.) asked the dean of the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance at the College of Charleston to assist in turning around Burke High School, the request seemed overwhelming.

- ❖ The students at Burke had continually turned in dismal test scores.
- ❖ There had been a revolving door of principals.
- ❖ Faculty morale was at an all-time low.
- ❖ Students were not effectively disciplined,
- ❖ The quality of teaching was poor.

Yet today, Burke High School is on the rise, primarily due to a community-partnership approach coordinated by the College's Center for Partnerships to Improve Education. College faculty and staff, the business community, nonprofit representatives, school district administrators, and government officials joined together to strengthen the school while at the same time weathered the ups and downs of the volatile school improvement process as a team.

The purpose of this document is to describe the partnership turnaround approach used at Burke High, provide outcome data to support the improvement of the school, offer suggestions for turning around students in low-performing schools and share information on how to avoid the possible pitfalls standing in the way of school improvement. The target audience includes school district administrators, deans of schools of education, state departments of education and education policymakers.

If you have questions or comments about our school-improvement work, please contact me at egelsonp@cofc.edu or 843.953.7629.

Sincerely,

Paula E. Egelson, Ed.D.

Director, Center for Partnerships to Improve Education

School of Education, Health, and Human Performance

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON

The Concept of the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education

In 2005, the president of the College of Charleston (S.C.) asked Dean Frances Welch, School of Education, Health, and Human Performance (EHHP), to develop a proposal to help expand the work of EHHP. Dean Welch worked with Prof. Christine Finnan to create a university-school district partnership to improve local schools in which low-performing students are an issue. The proposal received funding from the South Carolina legislature. Subsequently, the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (the Center) was born in 2005. A planning team of teachers and administrators then met with College of Charleston representatives and Charleston County School District (CCSD) leadership to organize long- and short-term goals for the Center. In late 2005, Paula Egelson became the Center’s full-time director.

Nancy McGinley, CCSD superintendent, was happy to be affiliated with a higher education institution.

“It got people’s attention,” McGinley said. “[The association] showed that we have a K–16 continuum – that there was an overlap in learning.”

The Center Goals

The Center became a consortium of college educators, public school educators, business people, civic leaders and community representatives that collaborated and planned to strengthen the educational outcomes of students in South Carolina. It was established to address improvement of preK–12 education in South Carolina. The Center currently serves four schools with low-performing students in the tricity area.

The goals for the Center are to:

- ❖ improve performance and reduce the dropout rates of students in South Carolina public schools.
- ❖ increase enrollment of minority and low-income students in higher education institutions.
- ❖ identify and implement a preK–16 curriculum that prepares South Carolina youth for employment in the 21st-century workforce.
- ❖ re-engage disaffected students in education.
- ❖ educate teacher candidates to work effectively in schools with low-performing students and to seek employment in such schools.
- ❖ establish expectations, incentives and professional development for teachers to make a long-term commitment to work in schools with low-performing students.
- ❖ align curriculum and expectations between preK–12 public schools and higher education.
- ❖ improve understanding of issues limiting urban and rural students’ futures and identify joint efforts to address these issues.

A Three-Strand Approach to School Improvement

The Center is composed of three strands:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Research
3. Community outreach

The teaching and learning team brings together College of Charleston content-area education professors who share their best practices, provide professional development, academic programs and classroom instruction strategies. This approach enables the Center staff to build on the expertise and resources of professionals across the entire campus, thereby forging a connection among a broader community of educators to improve student achievement and facilitate teacher education. The research team conducts qualitative and quantitative research, and formative and summative evaluations, at the partnership schools annually. Ultimately, the Center staff examines which interventions support school success and student outcomes. The community outreach team serves as an advocate to support the goals that the Center staff has established. The primary purpose is to make the link between the schools and the local community. The team works with neighborhood associations and external community partners to facilitate student academic growth.

The Tenets of the Center

The basis for the partnership came from the work of Hal Smith of the Annenberg Institute of Reform (2005). Smith stated, “The imperative to raise achievement for all students provides an opportunity to go beyond a school system and create an educational system: a web of connections between schools and community partners that provide the support that children and youth need.” In addition, the approach that the Center staff used built upon the research of Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. Her theory of overlapping spheres of influence described the shared responsibilities of home, school, and community for students’ learning and development (2002).

The tenets of the Center formed over time. Over the first four years, the themes of collaboration, leadership, and community emerged and were supported by the current literature on partnerships. The Center leaders recognized the need for collaboration among all the partners at Burke who would offer regular, frequent and ongoing opportunities for learning. This approach was supported by the work of Crawford (2008). Leadership in the Center was both formal and informal, and very flexible. A depth of knowledge about issues relevant to specific university-school-community partnerships developed and grew. The staff used a variety of personal and social skills in this partnership work and they moved flexibly when focused on partnership matters. This component was girded by the research of Miller (2007).

Assistance to Burke

Located on a peninsula, historic downtown Charleston, South Carolina, is characterized by beautiful old buildings, friendly folks and warm southern charm. The College of Charleston – a state-affiliated liberal arts university where years ago admission for minorities was unattainable – is in the heart of downtown Charleston. It is the 13th-oldest college in the country, and its historic campus and strong academic programs draw students from around the world. Ironically, Burke, a high school that is nearly 100 years old, is just a few blocks away. The current Burke campus has been shared by high school and middle school students since 2005, and today serves primarily minority students. Begun as a vocational school for African-American students, Burke is one of 81 schools in the CCSD. Over the past decade, Burke was plagued by poor student performance, unstable leadership, ineffective teachers and a lack of parent involvement. For six years, the school failed to meet federal performance goals for adequate yearly progress. Then in 2006, due to the school’s unsatisfactory rating and its failure to implement improvement recommendations, the state Board of Education nearly declared Burke to be in a state of emergency. A takeover by the State Department of Education was a real possibility.

Turning Burke Around

Summer 2006 was a dark and dismal time for Burke. However, during this low period the school experienced a turning point. The bad press and the constant barrage of harsh criticism were stressful and embarrassing for Burke teachers, administrators, students and parents, but ultimately the possibility of a takeover galvanized the Charleston community.

“Boy, the threat of a takeover surely got everyone’s attention,” recalled Dean Welch. “This is a case where good things came as a result of a bad situation.”

Given Burke’s failing status and ongoing struggles, the school was ripe for a positive intervention.

“We knew we need[ed] to take drastic steps to turn around [the school’s current condition],” said CCSD superintendent Nancy McGinley.

Linard McCloud, Burke’s award-winning band director, said, “Sometimes you have to fall before you get up. We had to step up to the plate even more [because] students needed [someone to] believe in [them] and then come to believe in themselves so that they could be challenged and pushed to success.”

In August 2006, Burke officials presented their case against the school takeover, but they weren’t the only ones who spoke out. So did members of the Center, the mayor’s office, the Burke community, CCSD, and the dean of the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance at the College. Ultimately, the principal of Burke High School, the mayor and the state superintendent of education all came together to save the school from state takeover.

“The community support was astounding,” said Maurice Cannon, a Burke administrator. “It’s what helped put Burke on the radar screen.”

Center personnel worked with the CCSD to organize a parent advisory group, develop appropriate lesson plans, initiate effective professional development for the teachers and nurture appropriate school leadership.

Even after the threat of a takeover passed, community members remained steadfast in their collaborative efforts. The Center staff as well as teachers, administrators and students at Burke, College of Charleston professors and staff, local businessmen and women, and the mayor, superintendent and dean of EHHP all worked together to maximize their resources. They had one shared goal in mind: to improve the minds, spirits and lives of Burke students.

“The Center provided a forum for the larger community to get involved with Burke,” said Dean Welch.

People Who Have Made the Partnership Possible

To gain insight into what it takes to create and sustain a successful school improvement partnership, Center staff members spoke with some of the key players who were involved in the successful implementation of the partnership approach at Burke. These individuals include:

- ❖ Charles Benton, principal, Burke High School
- ❖ Maurice Cannon, assistant principal, Burke Middle School
- ❖ Paula Egelson, director, Center for Partnerships to Improve Education
- ❖ Christine Finnan, associate professor, director of College of Charleston Partners for Acceleration
- ❖ Faye Hicks-Townes, visiting associate professor, College of Charleston
- ❖ Melanie Hofmann, assistant, Center for Partnerships to Improve Education
- ❖ Andrew Lewis, associate professor, director of the Professional Development Center at the College of Charleston
- ❖ Linard McCloud, band director, Burke High School
- ❖ Nancy McGinley, superintendent, Charleston County School District
- ❖ Juanita Middleton, principal coach at Burke High School (years one and two)
- ❖ Tom Murray, instructor, University of Central Florida
- ❖ mutindi ndunda, associate professor (mathematics education), College of Charleston
- ❖ Meta Van Sickle, professor (science education), department chair, College of Charleston
- ❖ Fran Welch, dean, School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, College of Charleston

CENTER INITIATIVES AT BURKE

Before settling in at Burke, Center staff asked Burke faculty members, “What do you need and what do you want in order to make your school better?” To determine school needs, the Center staff also conducted an informal needs assessment at the beginning of the partnership; an examination of the school’s improvement plan and other school improvement documents were included in that assessment.

The Burke responses, documents review, and needs assessment outcomes resulted in 12 initiatives at the school over a three-year period – some focused on teachers and others on students. A brief description of each initiative is provided to demonstrate what occurred, why the initiative was needed and how the initiative changed over time.

1. The Principal Coach

Challenge: The new principal of Burke High School was not from South Carolina and therefore was unfamiliar with the state and CCSD educational policies and practices.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Burke experienced almost ten years of ineffective leadership because of “revolving door” principals and a lackluster administration. Because the veteran principal (Charles Benton), who was hired for Burke during summer 2006, was from another state and was unfamiliar with South Carolina and local district educational policies, the Center staff hired a local retired principal, Juanita Middleton, to serve as a principal coach. She acted as the principal’s advisor, organized the state external review team visit, worked with the school-improvement team and conducted teacher evaluations. As the principal became familiar with the local situation, Middleton’s role evolved into that of providing professional development to teachers on professional learning communities (PLCs), conducting teacher evaluations, assisting with the use of external community partners and developing the Advanced Placement Academy (APA) at Burke High.

“I became much more of a leadership coach than a principal coach [during year three] and [my new role] implied different responsibilities,” Middleton said. She explained that her role shifted from working with the principal to working more with the entire faculty. “I served more as a resource person. I provided information and strategies to teachers and administrators.”

2. Professional Development

Challenge: Past professional development activities for Burke teachers had been unfocused and piecemeal.

The Center staff provided the Charleston education community with professional development in the form of yearly school improvement conferences featuring national speakers. Local educators were welcome, and Burke teachers were actively involved in the school-improvement conferences. One of the conferences focused on teachers building PLCs in their schools and incorporating local educational resources. Teachers embraced the PLC initiative and PLCs became part of Burke’s instructional approach. Other conference themes included urban education, building communities and educating the whole child.

In the past, professional development for Burke teachers was scattered, expensive and unfocused. The College of Charleston professional development center offered targeted graduate renewal courses to Burke teachers based on their needs. In year two, a Bridges to Poverty course was offered to teachers. In year three, beginning and intermediate technology courses, including SmartBoard training, were offered to teachers who voluntarily elected to participate. Thirty teachers paid a minimal course fee that was reimbursed if they successfully completed the pass/fail course.

“The SmartBoard course was great,” one teacher said. “It solved several problems at once. It provided college credit for certification purposes, it benefited the students, and it was convenient having it here at school.” Another teacher praised the way the Center staff created a close relationship with Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston. She noted that 25 teachers took technical workshops on databases that were available at Addlestone Library and received library cards.

3. College of Charleston Professors Provide Technical Assistance to Teachers

Challenge: Burke educators were originally concerned that the College came in to “take over” the school.

Four College of Charleston professors provided technical assistance to Burke teachers in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and social studies. Across these four core subject areas, students had achieved at low levels. The professors worked with teachers via the PLCs and developed strong bonds with the department chairs and many of the teachers. The professors focused on science literacy, teacher empowerment, effective mathematics instruction and tutoring, student motivation, student writing through several student-generated book products, separate essay contests for young men and women, and e-mail correspondence with students in Vietnam.

The Center staff provided services and activities that Burke educators requested, rather than imposing changes from the top down. The professors helped departments develop common course syllabi, reflect on their classroom practices and procure funding for needed equipment.

“I know that I had an impact because teachers asked me for ideas,” said one of the professors. “It takes time to build relationships. If the trust is not there, [teachers] won’t accept it.”

Superintendent McGinley thinks that the professors benefitted from the collaboration just as much as the Burke teachers.

“The college professors gained tremendous insights into how to be successful in an urban high school,” McGinley said. “[Now they can better] prepare their students for their teaching careers by giving them a realistic sense of what’s required in urban high schools.”

4. External Partners

Challenge: Burke had lots of community partners, but they operated in isolation and there was little communication between the school administration and the partners.

Given its downtown location and vibrant history, Burke had heavy community involvement in support of the school. At the start of the partnership, more than 30 organizations identified themselves as partners with Burke. Unfortunately, the partners had typically operated in isolation and communication with educators was minimal.

One of the first tasks Center personnel tackled was to assist with the organization of the external partners. The partners provided a variety of supports that addressed numerous goals that the Center staff had outlined – including scholarships, mentoring, motivational activities and professional development for teachers. The Center staff organized quarterly meetings that allowed the partners to meet, discuss efforts and receive periodic updates about Center efforts at Burke. In addition, the staff worked with an administrator at Burke to make information about resources offered through the school’s partners available to teachers. Prof. Andrew Lewis from the College of Charleston, and the Center staff, also worked with a group of community members to develop a community outreach team, which met quarterly.

Initially, working with so many external partners, each with its own agenda, didn’t serve the purpose of collaboration. Because there had been no coordination among the 30 external community partners, their activity was sporadic and their involvement piecemeal. Without a shared common purpose, an individual organization’s presence lacked meaning, sustainability and focus.

“When I went to the first meeting [for external partners, we] were attempting to understand what everyone’s role was as an external partner. We were a little confused,” said Erica Carter, program director for It’s Up to Me at The Citadel. “But [with the help of the Center staff] coordination improved and confusion lessened.”

Other activities that partners supported were scholarship aid for students, professional development for teachers, healthy eating programs for students and faculty, and College of Charleston library privileges.

5. Tutoring Programs at Burke

Challenges: Students needed additional academic help. Coordinating tutoring programs at Burke using College of Charleston students was difficult to undertake due to students’ schedules, activities and holidays.

Three tutoring programs that used College of Charleston students as tutors were implemented at Burke. One program was a weekly after-school SAT tutoring program for band students that started at the request of the school’s band director. Because many of the band students aspire to attend college, and some obtain music scholarships, the program was initiated to strengthen their SAT performance and make them more competitive applicants. The second tutoring program focused on the South Carolina High School Assessment Program (HSAP), the exit exam for high school students. The tutoring program started at the request of the school administration. Tutoring took place daily after school during late winter to better prepare Burke students to pass the exit exam. The third program was a voluntary in-class tutoring program offered to assist Burke seventh- and eighth-grade teachers. The teacher coach at the school asked for classroom help from college students because so many students were struggling academically. College of Charleston tutors supported teachers by providing one-on-one tutoring, assisting students in their work and acting as the teacher’s assistant.

The tutoring did not work as well as hoped for two reasons: 1) the voluntary nature of the tutoring program led to poor attendance by Burke students, and 2) the tutoring was not consistent because the high school and college had conflicting schedules. Burke students suggested that instead of tutoring with different tutors, perhaps a mentoring program would be more meaningful.

6. College of Charleston Pre-Service Teachers

Challenge: In the past, College of Charleston clinical interns (student teachers) were not assigned to Burke for their field experiences and clinical internships (student teaching).

Burke is an urban school in downtown Charleston that needs quality teachers. In addition, clinical interns need to garner experience working in traditionally high-poverty schools. While the College of Charleston School of Education, Health, and Human Performance had often placed students for field experiences in schools with low-performing students, there was not a consistent history for placing clinical interns at Burke. Because of Center staff involvement in the school and its improvement, the College began placing clinical interns at Burke and arranging for other students to observe in Burke classrooms.

7. Motivational Activities for Students

Challenge: In the past, Burke students did not participate in many motivational activities due to cost constraints and a lack of resources.

The motivational activities that were offered for Burke students were varied and creative. In November 2007, Erin Gruwell, author of *The Freedom Writers*, spoke at Burke High School. The community-wide event was well attended (650 people). In preparation for the event, Burke students read and discussed *The Freedom Writers* and the school media specialists showcased the book in the libraries. The high school media specialist created a literacy fair event. In addition, local bookstores and departments at the school created literacy exhibits on the day of the Freedom Writers presentation. All students in the school had a chance to view and participate in the exhibits.

The Burke cotillion for ninth-graders took place in the spring on the College of Charleston campus. It has been held three times. In preparation for the cotillion, students learned dance etiquette and how to behave at formal occasions. The students dressed formally for the occasion and delivered speeches, drank refreshments and danced. This cotillion was started by a Burke administrator who saw a need for social skills on the part of students.

The student-of-the-month award for Burke Middle School students was another motivational activity that the Center staff initiated. Each month, teachers nominated a student whose selection was based on achievement and behavior. The students and their parents were honored at a monthly doughnut breakfast and given a goody bag of school supplies.

8. Student Writing Products

Challenge: Previously, Burke students had engaged in few personalized writing activities.

As College of Charleston professors Tom Murray and Faye Hicks-Townes worked with Burke teachers, they saw the advantage for Burke students to develop books and magazines based on their own writings. They believed publication development would improve students’ writing skills, build school pride, and support student self-esteem. In Burke social studies classes, students created a book about the Civil Rights Movement in Charleston, prepared a document about a pen pal e-mail exchange between Burke and Vietnamese students, and wrote a personal history book about the families of Burke students. In English classes and on field trips to the College, students wrote poems on a variety of topics that were compiled in magazine form. One student pointed out that the “My Life as a Girl” poetry project helped her build her confidence and meet new people. Another student described it as, “a good opportunity to go to the College and work with college students.”

9. Summer Enrichment Activities for Burke Students

Challenge: Students did not have the opportunity to participate in after-school learning opportunities.

When the Center staff began working at Burke, it was apparent that students had not been exposed to a variety of cultural and educational offerings, despite the fact that they lived in downtown Charleston. They also did not have enough positive summer activities so the Center staff offered summer enrichment programs to Burke students. The program included a two-week morning camp for 20 Burke middle school students each June. Middle school students who were thinking of going to college, and had positive behavior and good grades, took part. There was a combination of in-school activities – a book to read and discuss, computer lab projects to complete, a journal to write – and field trips to museums, cultural spots and a water park, as well as an environmental boat trip. Several Burke Middle School teachers and Center staff members coordinated activities.

Burke High students who planned to attend college took part in an overnight program on the College of Charleston campus. Students stayed in residence halls for three days and ate meals in the cafeteria. They participated in academic programs, such as science and theatre, and visited the admissions office, the cultural diversity center, the leadership center, the student health office and the campus art gallery. Center staff and Burke teachers chaperoned.

Several students said, “College overnights and visits to campus were fun and made us feel more comfortable being on campus.” A teacher added, “The summer programs opened students’ eyes to another world. Many of the students had never been to the beach, sat on a boat or gone fishing before.”

“The overnight was a big deal,” said one of the teachers. “It broke the ‘college is uncool’ thinking. They saw new opportunities for themselves.”

10. Dual Enrollment of Burke Students at the College of Charleston

Challenge: For almost a decade, high-achieving Burke students did not have the opportunity to take part in dual enrollment courses at the College due to the cost and a lack of access.

During the 1990s when there was an academic magnet program in place at Burke High School, there was also a dual enrollment program with the College of Charleston. When the academic magnet program was moved to another location and the era of revolving door principals at Burke began, dual enrollment of Burke students ended. In an attempt to provide high-performing Burke students with opportunities for academic advancement, the program was reinstated by representatives of the Center in 2006. Students had to meet stringent academic guidelines to be enrolled in the program. Eligible students could enroll in 101-level classes at the College. Three to five students took part each year. The Center’s staff saw to it that the students’ registration costs, tuition and books were covered.

A Burke teacher had good things to say about the dual enrollment program. “It absolutely brought students to a higher level of learning,” she said. “The students lost that attitude of despair and now strive for success. ‘We’re ghetto and we ain’t going nowhere’ has changed to ‘we see beyond the neighborhood and we can be successful.’”

A student in the dual enrollment program said, “The classes prepared me for college. I was responsible for getting to class and doing my schoolwork. I had to stay on top of my game and be organized.”

11. Teachers Working Together

Challenge: Few Burke educators worked collaboratively.

In the past, most Burke teachers worked independently. Teachers who taught the same courses did not plan together. Common assessments were not created and common academic goals did not occur. Students’ academic strengths and weaknesses were not discussed. Center personnel introduced the idea of PLCs to the Burke principal coach and the school principal in 2006. The learning communities empowered Burke teachers to:

- ❖ work collaboratively in a team.
- ❖ enhance content planning, instruction and assessment.
- ❖ sustain the partnership in future years.

Burke administrators and selected teacher leaders were trained in PLCs by experts Rick and Rebecca DuFour at national training sites in 2006. The principal coach, Juanita Middleton, then introduced PLCs to both the high school and middle school staffs in 2007.

“The PLCs concentrate on learning rather than on teaching,” Benton, the school principal, said. “Teachers collaborated and discussed what was working and what wasn’t. We will try next year to give a common planning period for teachers teaching the same courses [and] allow them to meet more than once per week.”

12. Advanced Placement Academy

Challenge: Over the past ten years, only a few advanced classes were available on campus for Burke students.

At Benton’s previous schools, he had initiated APA for students and believed such an idea would work at Burke. In 2007, the CCSD approved an APA program at Burke and Middleton, the principal coach, set out to design the academy. She spent the school year gathering materials and developing the program, and then recruited students for the freshman class. Thirty freshmen from across the district made up the first APA class at Burke in fall 2008. The Center staff assisted with APA student orientation in the summer and initiated a service learning club for the APA students. Related to pluses about the program, one student commented that “APA students liked going to the College of Charleston library with their own cards; it helped them do research.” Another student commented positively about the service learning component.



“THE COLLEGE PROFESSORS GAINED TREMENDOUS INSIGHTS INTO HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL.”

- NANCY MCGINLEY, SUPERINTENDENT
CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

TRACKING STUDENT PROGRESS

Quantifiable data that illustrate the influence of the partnership on students are of major interest to the South Carolina Legislature, the South Carolina Department of Education personnel, local educators, and parents, and educators who are considering adopting the approach that the Center staff used. The following table presents quantitative analysis of selected variables at Burke High School from 2004 to 2005, prior to the time during which Center staff became involved – through 2008–2009, which was the fourth year of Center involvement. The data points relate to student academic performance and behavior. The charts that follow the table provide a graphical illustration of these data over time. The two purposes of these analyses are:

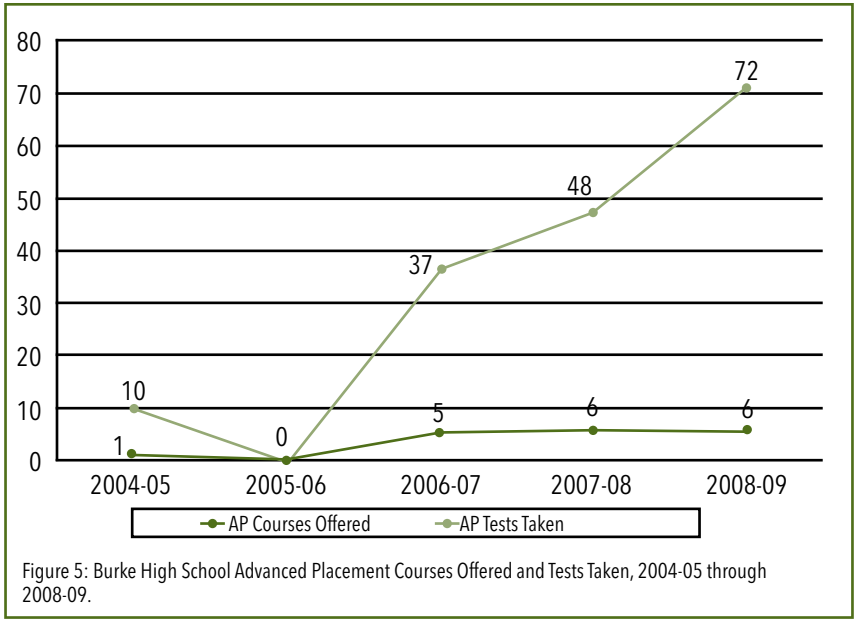
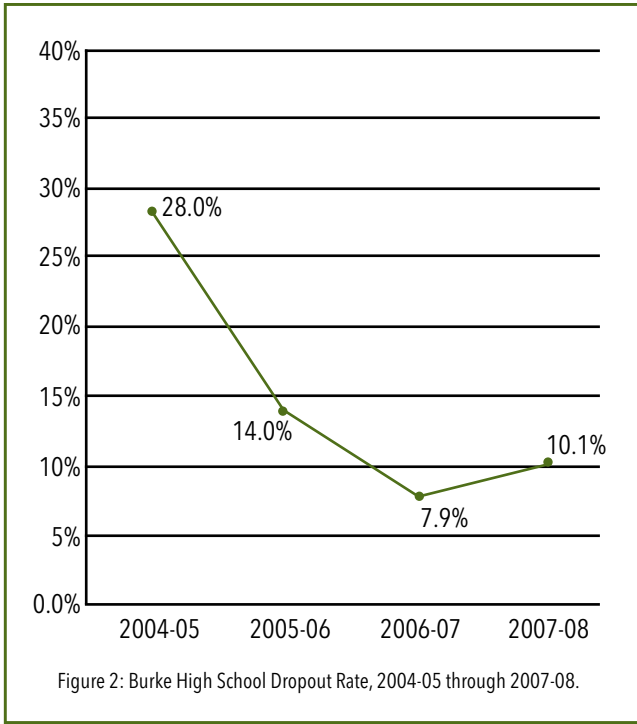
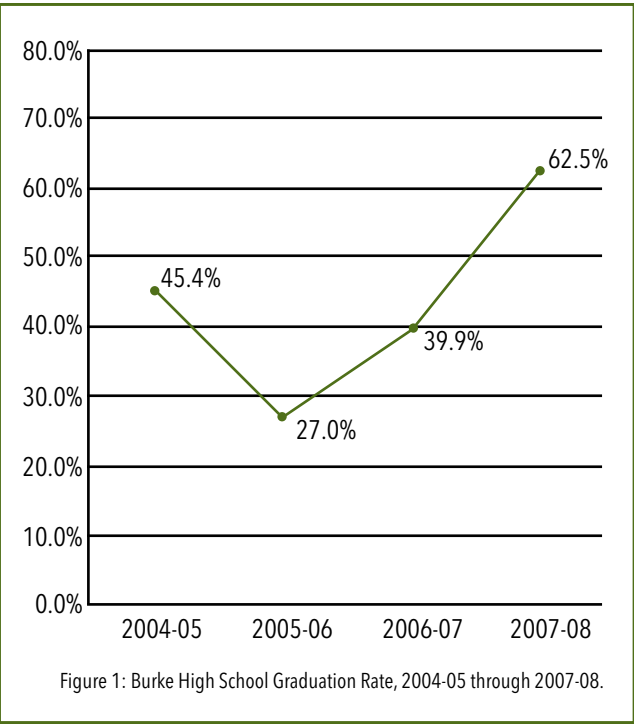
- ❖ to describe the situation at Burke.
- ❖ to allow for comparisons across years.

Data presented in the table and charts are provided by the CCSD, Department of Accountability and Academic Outcomes and the South Carolina Department of Education.¹

Review of the quantitative data for Burke High School revealed some interesting differences across the years of Center staff involvement. Some of the improvements may have been caused or facilitated by Center staff initiatives, but it is impossible to determine how much – if any of – these improvements are attributable to the efforts of the Center staff.

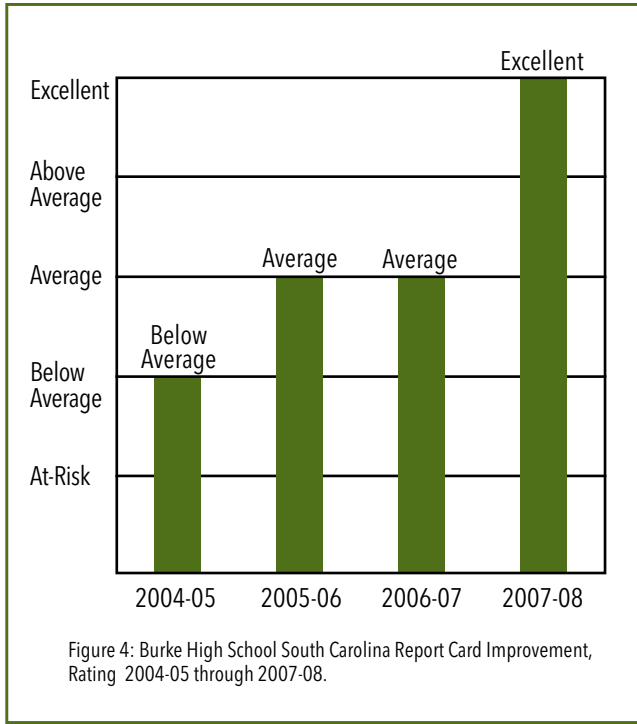
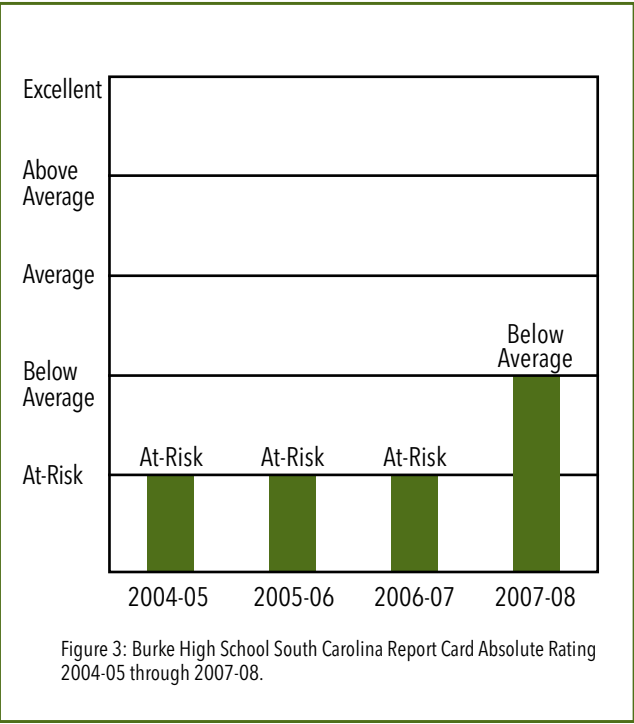
¹Includes 2008–2009 data that became available as of November 1, 2009.

		2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
ACCOUNTABILITY	Enrollment	793	649	603	569	513
	Attendance Rate	91.4%	90.1%	92.1%	90.7%	90.9%
	Graduation Rate	45.4%	27.0%	39.9%	62.5%	N/A
	Dropout Rate	28.0%	14.0%	7.9%	10.1%	N/A
	Report Card Absolute Rating	At-Risk	At-Risk	At-Risk	Below Average	N/A
	Report Card Improvement Rating	Below Average	Average	Average	Excellent	N/A
	Met AYP	No	No	No	No	N/A
ACHIEVEMENT	MAP Reading (%Met/Exceeded Virtual Comparison Group – VCG)	N/A	N/A	48.2%	50.3%	48.0%
	MAP Math (%Met/Exceeded Virtual Comparison Group – VCG)	N/A	N/A	41.0%	56.8%	53.4%
	EOC Passage Rate – English	39.6%	46.8%	35.3%	40.1%	32.4%
	EOC Passage Rate – Algebra I/Math Tech 2	51.5%	62.6%	39.1%	43.4%	35.2%
	EOC Passage Rate – Physical Science	10.8%	11.9%	11.1%	45.8%	29.5%
	EOC Passage Rate – U.S. History	N/A	N/A	20.9%	14.5%	27.3%
	HSAP Passage Rate – ELA	56.6%	71.8%	83.0%	76.0%	70.7%
	HSAP Passage Rate – Math	41.5%	60.4%	56.8%	61.2%	53.9%
	AP Courses Offered	1	0	5	6	6
	Students Enrolled in One or More AP Classes	10	0	27	39	46
	AP Tests Taken	10	0	37	48	72
	AP Tests Passed	0.0%	N/A	0.0%	2.1%	1.4%
	SAT Average Composite Score (Verbal + Math)	784	746	760	755	768
CLIMATE	Suspension Rate	56.5%	33.3%	36.2%	49.0%	45.7%
	Number of Expulsions	12	3	1	5	1
	Learning Enviroment: Parents Satisfied	69.7%	50.0%	80.0%	87.5%	Insufficient Sample
	Learning Enviroment: Students Satisfied	73.3%	75.0%	73.1%	71.8%	64.8%
	Learning Enviroment: Teachers Satisfied	66.0%	67.5%	60.3%	77.8%	60.7%



The above tables and figures point to several important findings. First, a few data points show no pattern of change, such as the attendance rate, reading results, percent of AP tests passed, suspensions and expulsions, and measures of academic progress (MAP), a formative assessment to determine academic growth. For several other data items, however, the following trends are evident:

- ❖ Enrollment at Burke steadily declined—from 793 students in 2004–2005 to 513 students in 2008–2009. (The declining enrollment is due to the fact that there has been a declining student population on the peninsula.)
- ❖ Passage rate for end-of-course English bounced up and down between the figures of 32%–47% over the last five years.
- ❖ Graduation rate improved during the last two years (up from 27.0% in 2005–2006 to 62.5% in 2007–2008).
- ❖ Dropout rate declined since 2004–2005 (at 28.0% in 2004–2005; at 10.1% in 2007–2008).
- ❖ Report card ratings – calculated by the South Carolina Department of Education – improved (for absolute ratings, Burke rose out of the at-risk category in 2007–2008; for the improvement ratings, Burke rose to an average rating in 2005–2006, then up to excellent in 2007–2008).
- ❖ MAP math improved, based on a virtual comparison group analysis in which Burke students are compared to students who are similar on key demographic and test variables (41.0% of students met/exceeded their VCG in 2006–2007; 53.4% did so in 2008–2009).
- ❖ Passage rate for end-of-course physical science rose substantially in 2007–2008 (the passage rate was below 12% from 2004–2005 through 2006–2007, but rose to 45.8% in 2007–2008), although it declined somewhat in 2008-09 (to 29.5%).
- ❖ AP courses offered and the number of students enrolled in AP courses grew significantly from 2004–2005 to 2008–2009 (1 course was offered in 2004–2005, with 10 students enrolled; six courses were offered in 2008–2009, with 46 students enrolled).
- ❖ Proportion of Burke students enrolled in AP classes increased from 1.3% of students in 2004–2005 to 9.0% of students in 2008–2009.
- ❖ Parent satisfaction with the learning environment steadily improved from 2005–2006 to 2007-08 (50.0% of parents were satisfied with the learning environment in 2005–2006; 87.5% were satisfied in 2007–2008).



HOW THE CENTER STAFF BUILT A PARTNERSHIP

When Burke teachers and College of Charleston professors first heard about the Center, there was some resistance to working with the organization. Initially, some people questioned the motives of the Center staff and assumed the organization was a “pet project” of the dean. Others thought the College was coming in to take over Burke. Over the past three years, however, the organization has proven itself to skeptics and others. The Center staff has published research papers and magazines; hosted annual conferences; sponsored special school/community events, submitted proposals for needed projects in the Charleston area; supported pre-service teachers and professors; and conducted research in schools—all in an effort to improve schools with low-performing students and to prepare local pre-service teachers better.

Ingredients for Success

As with the execution of any good recipe, in order to turn out well, all of the necessary ingredients must be included. To omit key ingredients from the mix would result in a bland, unsuccessful, even disastrous final product. The Center staff found that in order for a school/community partnership to work well, the following “ingredients” needed to be included at Burke: a) trust and communication, b) a partnership approach that avoided top-down management, c) stable leadership in the Center and in the partnership schools, d) community support, e) key connections in the community, f) the right people, g) teachers who worked together, and h) the need to be nimble.

Trust and Communication

Teachers at Burke were initially skeptical of the partnership. They expected another top-down management approach to be thrown their way. They did not think they would have a voice in the process. And they did not understand or embrace the newly appointed role of principal coach. But the staff was pleased when they learned that this partnership was going to be different from any other school improvement plan they had ever experienced.

Right from the start, the Center staff sat down and talked with Burke faculty, administrators and community members to determine their needs. Giving teachers a voice and asking them to contribute their opinions made Burke teachers feel part of the process.

Some teachers resisted change while others embraced it. Still, Prof. Finnan said that even teachers with the best of intentions did not always know where to begin or what to do. But the Center staff members helped to alleviate the fear that paralyzed a lot of teachers where accountability was concerned.

“We helped them see that it was okay to try something and fail at first,” said Prof. Finnan. “[Failing and trying again] is the only way to improve.” Middleton added, “We did not point blame when mistakes were made. Once people started to feel a sense of synergy and could see that they were working toward a common goal, great things started to happen.”

Over time, Burke teachers and staff became more receptive to collaboration.

A Partnership Approach that Avoids Top-Down Management

When the Center staff first stepped into Burke, they were empathic to Burke faculty who were resistant to their presence in the school. The Center staff, however, made it clear that this partnership experience was going to be different – and meaningful – for everyone involved.

From the very beginning, decisions were made jointly. The effort was collaborative rather than directive, responsive rather than prescriptive, inclusive rather than divisive; there was very limited top-down management.

“We never approached it from a position of authority,” said Andrew Lewis, College of Charleston associate professor and director of the Professional

Development Center. “It was not an ‘us versus them’ mentality. Once teachers and administrators understood that we all wanted the same thing, they were on board.”

As one administrator put it, “When two bulls fight, it is the grass that suffers.”

Stable Leadership

Burke had suffered unstable leadership for a number of years, and that lack of stability was negatively affecting both teachers and students.

“There is no continuity for what you’re attempting to implement if your leadership keeps changing,” said Maurice Cannon, an administrator at Burke. “Without stable administrators inside the school, we could not share goals of the partnership with the faculty.”

The right infrastructure had to be in place in order for things to work. Egelson has been the perfect leader for the Center because she works well with various entities.

“She has had the right temperament for the position,” said principal Benton. “She is a good coordinator with a good knowledge of the curriculum.”

Other leadership positions were crucial as well—namely principal Benton, who took the helm with pride and confidence.

In addition, Juanita Middleton repeatedly demonstrated her passion and enthusiasm for children.

Community Support

Ownership of Burke clearly now extends beyond the school district as evidenced by the community celebration of Burke’s successes.

“When Burke made the gains, the college was almost as excited as we were,” said superintendent McGinley. “It was very positive to have a sense of shared responsibility for Burke’s success.”

“When we first came into the school, the morale was at an all-time low,” said Middleton. “[Then over time I saw] more people talking positively about Burke and trusting us and sending their kids to us to get a good education. I [saw] a progression of community support and trust from the community.”

Key Connections

When Burke was on the brink of being taken over by the state, times were tough. But during that time, key connections were made. The partnership developed a good working relationship with the mayor’s office—a relationship that continues to thrive, even now, three years after the crisis has passed.

Many other great connections were formed as well. The external community partners were pleased with how the presence of the Center staff enabled them to more easily build relationships in and around the community.

“The relationship between us and Burke was benefitted by our ability to connect with faculty and students and find out what things were going on,” said Erica Carter, program director for It’s Up to Me at The Citadel. “The Center is a part of why connections improved.”

Mary Joan Oexmann, program coordinator for the Lean Team (a program that promotes good nutrition and exercise), said that being involved with the Center staff enabled her to communicate with and build relationships with other schools. Claire Fund, director of administrative services at Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston, also benefitted from communication.

“Having the Center members meet as a group was helpful so that we could learn what other folks were doing,” said Fund. “Then we could piggy back our services to theirs.”

“WHEN BURKE MADE THE GAINS, THE COLLEGE WAS ALMOST AS EXCITED AS WE WERE. IT WAS VERY POSITIVE TO HAVE A SENSE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR BURKE’S SUCCESS.”

- NANCY MCGINLEY, SUPERINTENDENT
CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT



The Right People

Teachers at Burke had not been evaluated in years. When Benton and Middleton first came to Burke, they saw teachers who needed to be motivated and who deserved respect. In short, they saw many opportunities for success. Benton and Middleton got a handle on evaluating teachers. Most of the teachers stayed; a few ineffective teachers were dismissed or decided to leave.

Added Dean Welch, “The nature of the Center initiative was such that it brought in good people who wanted to make a difference. It pulled folks in from a variety of disciplines who might not have otherwise found an opportunity to get involved with improving a poor-performing school.”

Teachers Working Together

The Center staff took steps to empower teachers. One way they empowered teachers was through the development of the PLCs that created a collaborative culture that didn’t exist before. PLC meetings started with little faculty buy-in. Over time there was a shift in thinking as teachers found that the meetings enabled them to discuss what did and did not work in the classroom and make the necessary adjustments to the instruction.

“When teachers learned that they had the power of choice, they became more positive about being involved,” recalled one Burke teacher. “They took ownership and made decisions based on best practices.”

The Need to Be Nimble

To achieve a smooth transition during a difficult phase of the implementation process, people on both ends of the partnership had to be flexible and adapt to the school’s needs.

When the Center was first created, the staff did not know “who” Burke was so they had to learn to be nimble and deal with whatever challenges were thrown their way. They were able to quickly shift things around to meet school needs, since those needs were always changing.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND CAVEATS

The Burke/Center partnership has been a fulfilling journey for everyone involved as the attitudes and actions of teachers, students, and community members have all changed for the better.

“It was so rewarding to witness the excitement in teachers as they learned how to implement strategies in their classrooms that helped their students improve,” said Prof. Lewis. Prof. Finnan added, “I enjoyed watching young, inexperienced teachers grow exponentially as a result of this partnership. I saw teachers pull from strength that I do not think even they knew they had.”

The transformation in the students, who became more involved, more engaged, and more motivated to learn, was rewarding and measured.

“Seeing the culture change at the school and the celebration surrounding that change was a joy to watch,” said Dean Welch.

As a partnership approach like the Center’s is planned and implemented, some challenging issues will likely present themselves. Such challenges tend to operate both as strengths and limiting factors at the same time.

Unintended Perceptions

Much of what a partnership like this one attempts to do is to alter perceptions—of the community, of teachers, of students. In the course of positively impacting these perceptions, others may arise that can be detrimental to the mission if left to grow unchecked. One perception that evolved during the Burke/Center partnership was that staff of the Center would provide money. Clearly, funding is a necessary component, and the Center staff did provide funds for selected personnel, supplies, materials and the like. If the partnership becomes viewed as a fountain of money, however, instead of as an additional foundation of support, it can thwart the ability of the initiative to have a broader, deeper impact.

Another perception that developed within the larger college community is a sense of elitism about the Center. Housed in the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance (SOEHHP). The Center was conceived by the dean, in consultation with the superintendent of schools, and has come to be viewed as something of a “favorite child” within SOEHHP. Now aware of this perception, the Center staff will work toward modifying it.

A third perception developed because of the intense relationship that Center staff members had with Burke. The Center staff not only took on fortifying Burke as its inaugural project, but they also pledged their assistance for three to five consecutive years. Therefore, in the minds of many, the Center has become inexorably linked to Burke. Some worry that such a strong association may hamper the ability for the Center staff to provide assistance in a broader realm.

Voluntary Approach

Teachers at Burke were not required to participate in Center activities. A voluntary approach was challenging because the teachers who could have made a positive difference in terms of their level of experience and motivation didn’t necessarily show up. Therefore, not as many people were reached as originally intended.

Implementation Dip

As new processes are established and put into place, it must be remembered that significant change—through a partnership model or other approach—rarely follows a smooth uphill trajectory. In fact, early stages of implementation may be accompanied by an “implementation dip” during which results actually appear to decline (Fullan, 2001). In the case of Burke, improving results indicate that the school has moved past the implementation dip and is now on the upswing.

Coherent Focus

When a school has enormous needs, there are often multiple initiatives in place. Managing these different—and sometimes competing—initiatives is a mammoth task but one that is vital to ensure a coherent, singular focus. A multitude of partners offer a multitude of answers, each a logical outgrowth of their particular talents, philosophies, and resources. Some initiatives may be non-negotiable, such as personnel provided through the State Department of Education, essentially imposing a factor that is beyond one’s control. The more attention that is devoted to managing this potpourri of partners, the more likely it is that the underlying initiatives can be tailored to meet the needs of the school in a focused, coherent fashion.

Funding

Finally, funding a partnership like the one described here is obviously a major challenge. In the case of the Burke/Center partnership, funding originally came from the state legislature, which provided flexibility in how the funds could be spent. A downside to this type of funding, however, is that it is not dependable. Recently, the Center has been included in the College of Charleston budget, providing much greater financial stability, albeit at a lower level.

Help for Other Schools

The reform at Burke was dependent on strong leadership from Charles Benton, Juanita Middleton and a core of dedicated teachers, and the dedicated work of the Center director and College of Charleston faculty. In addition, appropriate resources, targeted professional development, coordinated community partners, helpful technical assistance and the implementation of PLCs were critical to its success.

Center personnel worked closely with low-performing students for four consecutive years. Center support at Burke diminished this fall as the Center moved to another school with low-performing students in the community. Burke will not be abandoned, however. The Holmes Partnership—a group of minority scholars at the College of Charleston—will be working at the school to support teachers and students. Plus, because of the Center’s presence during the past three years, the school has the necessary tools to continue to steadily and positively move forward.

“We believe there are structures, procedures and personnel in place at Burke for its continued success,” said Egelson, who noted that the Center staff will continue to evaluate student outcomes at Burke.

Dean Welch added, “Thanks to the Center partnership,” she said, “Burke is on a trajectory to get better and better.”

Superintendent McGinley has heard positive feedback sustaining and replicating the work that has been done at the Center.

Said McGinley, “I’d love this partnership [approach] to be one that we can rely on in the future as a strong strategic pillar of success.”

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